

Kentucky Literacy Link

A Publication of the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE)

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Volume 4, Issue 8

March 2014

Every Family is an Asset: Are You Investing Wisely?

Mikkaka "MK" Overstreet is a KDE literacy consultant and the editor of this publication.

In February, I had the awesome opportunity to attend the National Center for Families Learning (NCFL; formerly the National Center for Family Literacy) annual conference and first-ever Families Learning Summit in Washington, D.C. As you may have gleaned from previous newsletters, family literacy is a passion of mine. As such, I was completely in my element at the conference.

There were lots and lots and LOTS of memorable learning mo-

ments at the conference (see the spotlight on page 2 for a few highlights), but one thing stood out for me very early on. Dr. Joyce Epstein of John Hopkins University stated in her session: "Every parent is a resource and every family is an asset."

I wonder if we truly see our families this way. Are we too busy being frustrated with language barriers or difficult work schedules or incomplete homework or poor conference attendance to look for the positives our families possess? Do we recognize and respect the complexities of today's families?

Most importantly, how are we managing our assets? Are we utilizing all of the resources represented by the boys and girls in our classrooms? Do we know what our students' caregivers do for a living, where they've been, what they do in their spare time? If so, have we gotten creative about connecting our classroom practice to their knowledge bases? I just read a response from a little girl who said she learned how to write "professionally" from listening to her mom talk business on the phone.

Kids are listening to their parents. Are we?

Kentucky Department of Education Updates

K-screener Data Publicly Released

At a January press conference at the Capitol, Gov. Steve Beshear publicly announced the results from the first statewide implementation of the common Kindergarten Readiness Screener. Terry Tolan, Executive Director of the Governor's Office of Early Childhood, and Education Commissioner Terry Holliday also participated in the news conference. See the full press release [here](#).

The good news is that 49 percent of students started kindergarten this school year ready to learn and succeed. However, nearly 26,000 students entered school unprepared for kindergarten work. The BRIGANCE K-Screener was administered to 50,532 kindergarten students in all 173 school districts at the beginning of the 2013-14 school year. The screener measures how well a child is prepared to succeed at the time the screener is administered.

This data will help us prevent and close achievement gaps before they become insurmountable. It will not only help kindergarten teachers make sure they are providing the best instruction to meet individual student needs, but also will ensure our primary grades are building on a student's knowledge. Our goal is for every child to be reading on grade level or above by the time they leave the 3rd grade.

You can find the kindergarten readiness screener data in the supplemental data section of KDE's [Open House](#) and it will be added to the school report card in the fall. To learn more about the common kindergarten screener, visit the Governor's Office of Early Childhood website at <http://kidsnow.ky.gov>.

Student results steady on EXPLORE and PLAN tests

Overall student performance on

EXPLORE and PLAN tests remained relatively unchanged in 2013, according to data released by the Kentucky Department of Education. The assessments, precursors to the ACT college entrance exam given to all public high school juniors in the state, test knowledge in English, mathematics, reading and science.

"We saw some minor shifts up and down in the results but they still compare favorably with the rest of the nation," Kentucky Education Commissioner Terry Holliday said. "In fact, in a couple of subjects, our students outperform students elsewhere." He pointed out that more Kentucky students took the tests this year and that can result in somewhat lower scores.

For more information, see the [press release](#).



Spotlight: NCFL Families Learning Summit

Mikkaka "MK" Overstreet is a KDE literacy consultant and the editor of this publication.

On Feb. 17-19, the National Center for Families Learning (NCFL; formerly the National Center for Family Literacy) held its annual conference and first-ever Families Learning Summit in Washington, D.C. I had the privilege of attending and learning alongside teachers, librarians, parents, family literacy program directors, principals, counselors, state and district level consultants and so many others hailing from as far as Hawaii, Alaska and Guam.

Still buzzing with the excitement of networking with so many colleagues dedicated to our children and their families, I am having trouble summarizing the experience. Nonetheless, below I attempt to share a few take-aways from the event. This is by no means a comprehensive list of all I heard and saw. Please visit the NCFL [website](#) for more information.

- Jack P. Shonkoff, director of the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, supported a two-generational approach to education with his work on brain research. According to Shonkoff, we must focus on development of adults to improve environments for children. Since the part of brain that manages skill building doesn't mature until 25-30 years, his theory of change centers on parents and employees in childcare centers. Learn more in this [video](#) shared during the conference's opening session.
- Joyce Epstein of John Hopkins University and www.partnershipschoools.org talked of her national network of partnership schools and their belief that excellent schools + strong families + healthy communities = successful students. She stressed the importance of all three "spheres of influence" in the equation being essential. According to Epstein, "Every parent is a resource and every family is an asset." She seeks to prepare "family-like schools" (where teachers treat each child the way a parent would, value them individually, etc.) and "school-like families" (which treat children the way a teacher would—expecting them to work hard, value education as important, to attend regularly and on time, etc.). That said, she

doesn't expect home to be second-shift school. Her organization has created TIPS (Teachers Involving Parents in Schools) for home learning that supports school learning. Learn more about TIPS [here](#).



- Patricia Lovett of NCFL shared protocols called "cultural assimilators" as tools for developing cultural awareness. Cultural assimilators start with a critical incident (story of an incidence of cultural dissonance) and have participants (teachers and students) explore the reasons behind the incidents. These are fun, actively involve students, and have been shown to be effective in controlled experiments. They were developed from military and Peace Corps work for ambassadors to other cultures. In addition to fostering deep discussion, the use of cultural assimilators could lead to complex argumentative writing opportunities and could also be used as guidance for how to interact in the workplace, thus strengthening career readiness. Click [here](#) for more information.
- Christopher Lehman, author of [Falling in Love with Close Reading](#) and [Pathways to the Common Core](#) shared a great deal of insight around the standards and their implementation. He stressed the necessity of reading the standards for yourself (and not just the highlights or the shifts documents) so that you can make instructional decisions based on students not just to meet a standard. He emphasized that the standards don't say *how* we teach and that they expect students to be able to do many things independently, making it very important that we go about instruction with their needs in mind. His suggestions for teaching (taken from his books) were practical and fun. Lehman and Epstein discussed the Common Core Standards further in a panel discussion on Monday.
- Shirley Brice Heath, renowned author of [Ways With Words](#), spoke about the importance of talk, emphasizing the

necessity of close, directed talk between caregivers and children. She discussed the known gap in number of words acquired by children from minority versus middle class families, but likened that to "comparing trained chefs to novice cooks". Instead, Heath conducted a study of all lower class, monolingual Spanish-speaking families and found high variability between them; the ones talking directly to children had 12,000 words a day at 24 months versus the low end of 600-800 words a day. Much of this depended on how much parents worked outside of the home and if they had untrained teens babysitting and leaving the children to play alone or watch television. The type of talk also mattered; she cautioned against commands, one-sided conversations and accusatory or condemning talk. Heath proposed that if more studies were done within groups this way there would be variability within groups of even middle class and upper class professional families. Finally, Heath touted community resources as important centers of learning and shared projects aimed at opening museums, art galleries, botanical gardens, science centers and performance halls to sustained learning experiences for children.

- Actress, advocate, and author ([My Brother Charlie](#)) Holly Robinson Peete shared heartwarming and hilarious stories of her family's journey with her son's autism. She talked about awareness and acceptance and the importance of teachers in the lives of all children.
- A representative from Sesame Street shared a wealth of resources available from the renowned media program. Stay tuned for an in-depth exploration of these materials in the next issue of the *Literacy Link* (or click [here](#) if you can't wait).

I've shared but a snippet of my experiences but I hope you, like me, are left feeling inspired by the work going on across the country and within our communities. Together, we can be the village that raises children ready for this evolving 21st century world.

Pondering Professional Learning: The Importance of Teacher Planning Time

Recently, I have been reflecting deeply on Kentucky's ongoing transition from professional development (PD) to professional learning (PL), our professional learning standards and related legislation. As I've thought about how important ongoing, personalized professional learning is to the teaching profession, I decided I should dedicate a column to exploring the topic. Apparently, my conviction couldn't have been more timely, as the Kentucky legislature is currently considering a bill around professional learning. Kentucky Commissioner of Education Terry Holliday addressed this in a recent blog post, which I am sharing here in its entirety. I look forward to exploring this topic more in upcoming issues.

-MK Overstreet

One of the issues most important to Kentucky educators is time. Recently, Representative Rita Smart filed [HB 202](#) to require teachers be provided a minimum of 150 minutes per week for non-teaching activities. Below is a letter I sent to her in support of this legislation.

Dear Representative Smart:

Thank you for bringing HB 202 relative to teacher planning time forward. This is an issue that is critically important to Kentucky's educators.

In 2011 and again in 2013, education partners in Kentucky asked our teachers to respond to a working conditions [survey](#). More than 86 percent responded to the survey, representing the voices of more than 43,000 teachers. Teachers are very positive about the working conditions in their schools with one major exception – time. Teachers feel they do not have adequate time for individual or collaborative

planning, both of which have proven to be the most effective in improving student learning outcomes.

While many of our schools are doing an excellent job providing teachers with individual and collaborative planning time, the results show that more than 33 percent of our teachers do not feel that planning time is adequate. More than 26 percent of our teachers have less than one hour of individual planning time per week and more than 58 percent of our teachers have less than one hour of collaborative planning time per week.

I applaud you for being very clear that teacher planning time is essential to improve student learning outcomes. I am very supportive of your wording in the legislation that the nonteaching (planning) time should be “teacher-directed and SHALL be used for common planning time to collaborate on curriculum development and articulation, examine student work and review student performance data, and plan instruction and discuss instructional strategies for struggling students” The nonteaching time also will provide teachers with opportunities for job-embedded professional development.

I am very supportive of HB 202 because this legislation will provide teachers with time to improve their professional practice, learn from colleagues, and improve student learning outcomes. Throughout the last few years, Kentucky has asked much from its teachers. Senate Bill 1 of 2009 required teachers to implement new and more rigorous learning standards and more rigorous assessments. Our teachers have done a remarkable job without resources and without adequate time for planning and profes-

sional learning. While they have done a terrific job in improving college- and career-readiness rates, there still is much work left to do. Too many of our minority and disadvantaged children are not achieving success. Through HB 202, teachers will have more time to focus on the challenges of closing achievement gaps and helping all children reach college and career readiness.

In my analysis of schools and the working conditions survey data, I believe that many of our schools are already providing teachers with individual and collaborative planning time. Should HB 202 become law, the Kentucky Department of Education will certainly work with all school districts to identify best practices in scheduling and staffing to meet the required minutes. As a matter of fact, numerous states already have legislation like HB 202 that has been successfully implemented. Also, the top performing countries in the world focus on collaborative planning time as described in HB 202.

As a former local superintendent, I implemented legislation similar to HB 202 and was able to do so without additional funding as is the current case in Kentucky with the majority of our school systems. The only caution I would offer is there may be a few small districts that would not have adequate funding to achieve the required minutes. In those few cases, I would offer that the Kentucky Department of Education could work with those districts to identify resources and waive implementation of the 150 minutes until resources could be identified.

Thank you again for supporting the needs of our teachers and students in the Commonwealth.

Continuous Instructional Improvement Technology System (CIITS) Training Page

The Continuous Instructional Improvement Technology System, or CIITS, is a multi-phase, multi-year project designed to provide Kentucky public school educators with the 21st-century resources they need to carry out highly-effective teaching and learning in every classroom in Kentucky. CIITS went live statewide on August 1, 2011.

In CIITS, teachers are able

to access Kentucky academic standards and directly linked, aligned, high-quality, multi-media instructional resources. These classroom materials are designed to engage students in learning and reinforce the standards being taught.

CIITS contains a lesson planning tool and scheduler to help teachers manage standards-based instruction in their class-

rooms. Teachers may also share instructional resources they design through CIITS. Kentucky educators have access CIITS 24-hours a day, seven days a week, through any Internet-connected computer configured with a modern browser

KDE's [Melissa Ferrell](#) has created a training page that offers a wealth of [training videos and support materials](#) available to

support you as you learn more about CIITS. [CIITS: Supporting Instructional Practices](#) is an online module is designed to support new users as they discover how to utilize CIITS to support best practice in any learning environment.

Visit KDE's [CIITS webpage](#) for more information, including technical help and contact information.

Survey Shows Kentucky Teachers Support KCAS

Kentucky teachers, like those in a nationwide poll, are enthusiastic about teaching the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) according to data released by KDE.

The data stem from the [Primary Sources](#) survey of 20,000 public school teachers nationwide last summer. The survey, conducted by the Harrison Group, asked teachers across the country their thoughts on implementing the Common Core State Standards – a set of clear, consistent guidelines for what students should know and be able to do for success after graduation.

- 97 percent of teachers are aware of the new English/language arts and mathematics standards
- 73 percent are enthusiastic about implementing the new standards in their classrooms
- 73 percent believe implementing the standards is or will be challenging
- 74 percent believe implementing the standards will require them to make changes in their teaching practice
- 73 percent felt they were prepared to teach the new standards in their classrooms
- 76 percent believe the standards will have a positive impact on students' ability to think critically and use reasoning skills

Several hundred Kentucky teachers voiced their opinions as part of the national survey. However, to gain a broader view of what Kentucky teachers think, KDE followed up with an online, anonymous, voluntary survey that was open from mid-November to mid-December. Questions focused on the [Kentucky Core Academic Standards](#) (KCAS) which include the Common Core State Standards in English/language arts and mathematics as well as the Next-Generation Science Standards. More than 6,700 Kentucky teachers responded to the open survey. Results show:

- 93 percent of those who teach English/language arts are implementing the KCAS in their classrooms
- 93 percent of those who teach mathematics are implementing the KCAS in their classrooms
- 49 percent of those who teach science have already started implementing the

new science standards in their classrooms

- 77 percent are enthusiastic about teaching the new standards in their classrooms
- 78 percent believe implementing the new KCAS has required or will require changes to their teaching practice
- 86 percent feel they are prepared to teach new English/language arts and mathematics standards
- 90 percent agree that the standards are more rigorous than previous standards
- 67 percent believe the standards will have a positive impact on college/career-readiness of students; 25 percent don't think it will be positive or negative; and only 8 percent think the standards will have a negative effect

To help the most students in their classroom meet the new KCAS, teachers say that they need a variety of additional resources. Of those that responded to the survey:

- 60 percent need aligned instructional materials
- 56 percent need student-centered technology
- 54 percent they need formative assessments
- 52 percent need summative assessments
- 45 percent need new curricula
- 37 percent need additional professional development on the new standards

Kentucky Education Association president Stephanie Winkler is not surprised by the results. The feedback she's gotten from superintendents and teachers is also largely positive.

"I, as a classroom teacher who just left in May, know that the standards not only made me a more focused teacher, but I saw the benefit to my students," Winkler said. "Kids are able to master concepts and think critically to apply their knowledge, so when they go onto the next level, they're more prepared, she said.

"Anybody who would say that we need to get rid of the common core standards in Kentucky has not been in the classroom and worked with them like the teachers have,"

Winkler said.

"What we really need is resources to support professional learning and aligned instructional materials and textbooks that support the standards' implementation."

Since the General Assembly passed [Senate Bill 1](#) in 2009 and it became law, teachers, administrators, school boards, professors and postsecondary leaders, education professional associations, education advocacy groups, parent groups and business organizations have been working diligently to implement its provisions, including creating and implementing the new, more rigorous academic standards. New English/language arts standards are being taught for the third year; new science standards will be implemented in the fall. New arts and humanities and social studies standards will follow in the future.

"Local school boards have the authority to go above and beyond these standards at any time; they represent the minimum of what students should know and be able to do," Education Commissioner Terry Holliday said. "Already, districts choose and local boards of education approve the curriculum their teachers use, so districts retain local control with the new standards."

Holliday said the Kentucky Core Academic Standards (KCAS) have resulted in great cost savings to the Commonwealth and came about thanks to the involvement and input of hundreds of Kentucky educators.

"To abandon the years' worth of work and the millions of dollars spent to develop and implement the new standards would be a waste and disservice to those who have worked hard to fulfill the directives of Senate Bill 1," Holliday said. "It would be demoralizing to teachers to start over with new standards and a setback to Kentucky students becoming college/career-ready.

"The bottom line is the new standards are working."

Visit the [KCAS webpage](#) on our website for more information.



Largest Common Core Learning Event of the Year



From February 20 to March 19, 2014, KDE will join Dr. Heidi Hayes Jacobs and School Improvement Network for a national online Common Core training.

The Kentucky Department of Education is excited to invite every educator in the state to join Dr. Heidi Hayes Jacobs for the largest-ever “book mob”—an unprecedented opportunity to access free Common Core guidance from the most renowned experts on the subject.

The book mob will be a four-week online study of Dr. Jacobs' *Mapping to the Core* LumiBook (ebook), available to all Kentucky educators through CITTS. During the event, educators will read *Mapping to the Core*, going online to discuss what they've

learned and to receive feedback and insights from Dr. Jacobs and her co-authors, Dr. Ann Johnson, Dr. Debbie Sullivan, and Dr. Marie Alcock.

KDE has organized this event specifically around the needs and challenges of Kentucky educators. Every Kentucky attendee will have the opportunity to:

- Interact with Dr. Jacobs and her team to see how they are solving implementation challenges around the US
- Network and get ideas and best practices for Common Core implementation from teachers and leaders all over the US
- Get resources for Common Core implementation that can be used im-

mediately in classrooms and front offices

When: The *Mapping to the Core* book mob begins on February 20 and continues every day until March 19, 2014.

Where: The entire event is being held online and will be available for reading and viewing from your *Mapping to the Core* LumiBook. All you need is a license to the *Mapping to the Core* LumiBook and an Internet connection.

How to sign up: To sign up for the *Mapping to the Core* book mob, visit <http://www.schoolimprovement.com/lumibook-mob-ky/>. Contact [Jackie Rogers](#) or [Melissa Ferrell](#) with any questions.



Carrie Cox has taught 4th grade at Eastern Elementary School in Henry County for over 13 years.

StoryJumper calls itself a simple place to create and discover stories for kids. According to the website, using StoryJumper is:

- Simple – StoryStart-er makes telling stories easy. They'll help you write a story in just seven steps.

- Fast – Use their art or your own drawings and photos to illustrate your story.
- Fun – Show how the world that you're an author. Share stories online for free and order beautiful hardback books starting at \$24.95

Purpose and Audience

The purpose of this site is to allow students to create children's books. The audience is K-12 and beyond, in my opinion.

Technology Critique: StoryJumper

Classroom Applications

You can have students use this in your classroom to create any kind of book; it doesn't have to be a children's book. I created a book of my own about technology. It is very simple and easy to use, and after you create a book you can share it with others online or purchase a hardback copy of it.

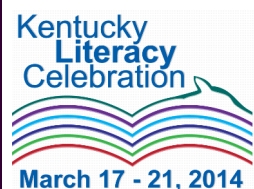
I have thought about using this site in my classroom by having my students create personal narratives or memoirs, make an information book about the

various animal groups, or even writing a story that involves math. This site is multi-modal because students interact with it, choose images, backgrounds and text to add to create their books.

Drawbacks

If I were going to change anything about this site it would be that there would be no set numbers of pages for your books. Right now, I think you only get 16 pages.

Upcoming Literacy Events Around Kentucky



connecting various aspects of life and learning. Kentucky Literacy Celebration (KLC) is a time to highlight literacy successes, share the great work surrounding literacy, and continue the focus on challenges we still face as a state.

In the not too distant past, Kentucky hovered around the bottom of national lists. Great strides have occurred to move the

2014 Kentucky Literacy Celebration
This year's theme of "Literacy Horizons" is inspired by the many wonderful literacy horizons

commonwealth upward on those lists and forward in literacy achievements. Kentucky has become a leader in many cases. We have a lot to celebrate, while still keeping a keen eye on the areas of needed improvement. KLC is our internal barometer to spotlight the gains and use them to foster needed changes to ensure literacy success for all Kentuckians.

All Kentuckians are invited to host, share, or participate in a literacy event. As listings of events are submitted from all across the state, they will be compiled and grouped by county. Some events encompass an entire week, while others are on specific days. Events will be coming in continually, so the

pages will be updated daily to accommodate additional participation announcements.

Click [here](#) to learn more about the celebration and how to share your event.

TALK Conference

On June 16-17 in Louisville, the Teaching Advocates Leading Kentucky (TALK) will hold its second annual conference.

Share a conference Save the Date [flyer](#) with your colleagues. If you have questions, please contact Michelle Duke at talk@kea.org or 502.696.8948.

Help

Your contributions of ideas and lessons that work are welcome. E-mail mikkaka.overstreet@education.ky.gov to submit. Your submissions may be included in the Literacy Link to help connect teachers across the state by sharing ideas, insights and best practices.

Access this and past Literacy Links on KDE's website: [Click Here](#)



If you have questions or concerns, we want to help. Contact:

- Cindy Parker – Literacy Coordinator – cindy.parker@education.ky.gov
- Kelly Clark – Literacy Consultant – kelly.clark@education.ky.gov
- Jackie Rogers – Literacy Consultant – jackie.rogers@education.ky.gov
- Teresa Rogers – Literacy Consultant – teresa.rogers@education.ky.gov
- Pamela Wininger – Literacy Consultant – pamela.wininger@education.ky.gov
- MK Overstreet – Literacy Consultant – mikkaka.overstreet@education.ky.gov
- Kathy Mansfield– Library Media/Textbooks Consultant – kathy.mansfield@education.ky.gov



Feedback from the Field

Your feedback helps us to tailor the Link to best meet the needs of teachers. Tell us how you're using it. Tell us what you want to see more or less of in upcoming issues. And don't forget to submit. We want to hear from you! [E-mail MK Overstreet](#).

"The content and writing style of this newsletter continues to impress and

challenge me."



–Cathy W.

able to contact her? I'd LOVE more information about the stems!
–Leigh Ann S.

I read January's newsletter and I noticed a great article on Thinking Stems that had been utilized at Wheatley Elementary and created by Bianca Nightengale-Lee. I tried to find her email in our directory, but didn't find anything. Are we

I apologize for omitting this information! Bianca Nightengale-Lee can be contacted at bianca.nightengale@jefferson.kyschools.us

–MK Overstreet

Additional Reading and Other Resources

- Winner of the United Kingdom Safer Internet Center's 'Best Content' competition, Mary Coen's [abc Joined Up](#) is an interactive app that helps children embed sound/symbol recognition and become confident joined up/cursive writers. Using a fun approach, it helps children understand the strokes or layers of cursive handwriting and then practice writing cursive letters and words on the tablet screen. The app design is based on a method of teaching handwriting and a multi-sensory literacy program that Coen designed and uses at her school.
- Looking for resources connecting science and literacy? Visit the Kentucky Education Development Corporation's science teacher leader network [resource page](#) for helpful tools, links to useful websites and quality texts.
- [Understanding Language](#) will be offering several [free](#) online courses (MOOCs) through Stanford University Online starting in March. The focus of these courses will be to support the language demand of the new standards. A pair of courses (one with a geared for elementary teachers, the other for secondary) will be about constructive classroom conversations. Courses build on a successful pilot of the course that was offered last fall, in which over 2,000 teachers participated. Teachers may take these courses as individuals or school districts can plan to involve teams of teachers. Courses start on March 6. To register, click the corresponding link for [Elementary](#) or [Secondary](#).
- The Kentucky Educational Television (KET) Young Writers Contest is an opportunity for young children to express their creativity by writing for an authentic audience beyond the walls of their school or home. Students in kindergarten through the 5th grade are invited to send in their illustrated stories and, for the first time, students in the 3rd

through 5th grades can choose to enter a 400-600 word short story without illustrations instead. The contest runs until April 15, 2014, and winners will be notified in May. Please visit the Young Writers Contest [website](#), which has links to the rules, scoring rubrics, and entry forms. For more information, contact KET Education consultant [Helen Morrison](#).

• In a recent op-ed in *USA TODAY*, Bill Gates, co-chair of the Gates Foundation, debunked three myths about the Common Core State Standards: 1) It was created at the federal level and didn't involve parents, teachers, or state and local governments. 2) It means students will have to take even more tests. 3) It is a curriculum and will limit teachers' creativity and flexibility. Read more [here](#).

